



Television as a Medium for US Public Diplomacy: A Case from Afghanistan

U.S. Department of State
Fourth Annual Conference on Program
Evaluation
June 7-8, 2011
George C. Marshall Center



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Background

- USAID sponsored "On the Road" - an innovative TV program in Afghanistan (late 2009)
- Objective: Informing and entertaining the Afghan audience; "stitching" diverse and divisive country together
- Focus: local development and reconstruction; history and traditions; tourism and attractions
- Reality TV format
- One province per episode



The Show (Clip)



Evaluation Context

- Interest in finding out the viewership numbers and profile (Spring 2010)
- Key questions of interest:
 - How many Afghans were viewing the program?
 - Who were these Afghans (demographics)?
 - What did they understand to be its main messages?
- Interest in assessing whether USAID should pursue a second season of the show



Evaluation Objectives

- Assess the numbers and the profile of the audience for the program
- Analyze the impact of the program on the viewers
- Gather feedback on the program for improvement





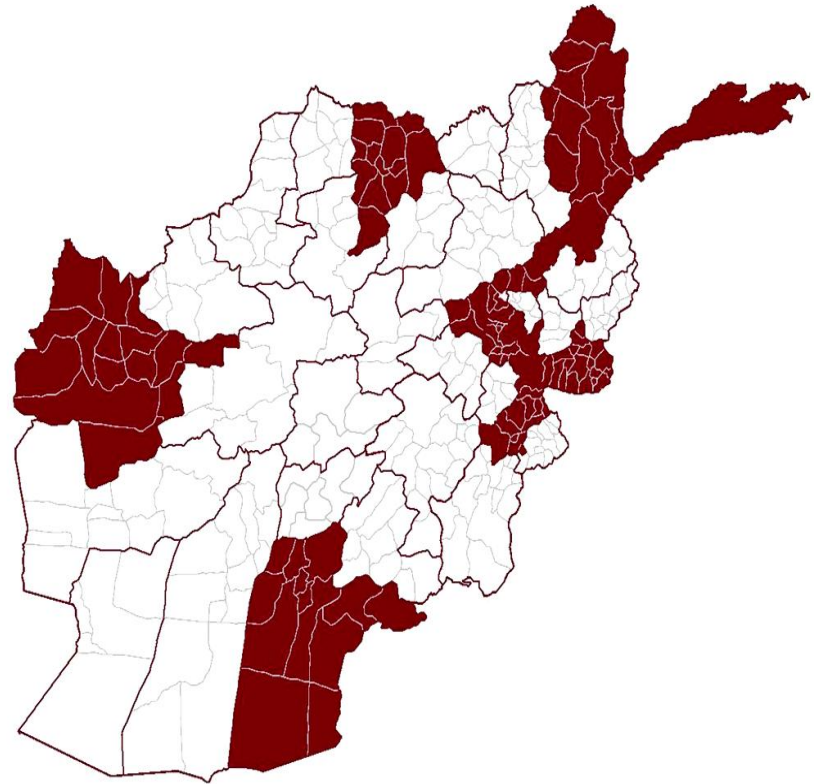
Research Approach

- Multi-method Research Approach:
 - One large quantitative survey of nine provinces broken down into two samples of 1063 respondents each
 - Nine focus groups (one in each province)
 - 45 key informant interviews (five in each province)



Methodology and Sampling Plan

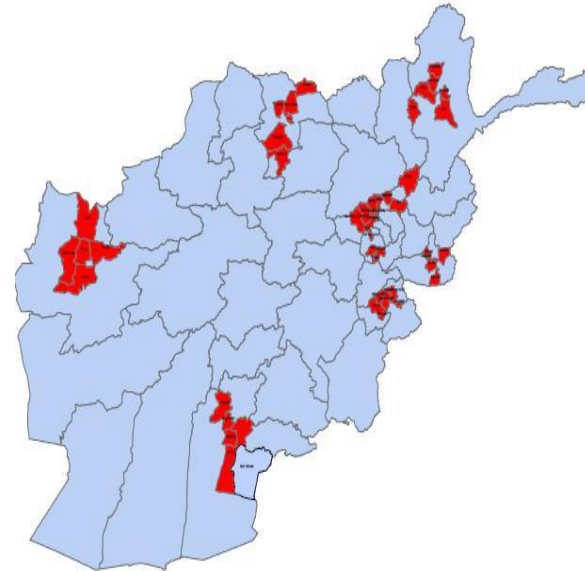
- Trade-off between selecting survey locations randomly and selecting those locations purposefully where people had access to TV
- We adopted a hybrid approach; random and purposeful sampling





Methodology and Sampling Plan (2)

Sampling Frame	
Province	No. of Districts
Kabul	15
Kandahar	12
Heerat	16
Nangarhar	22
Paktia	11
Balkh	15
Panjsher	7
Badakhshan	28
Parwan	10
Total	136



PROVINCE LEVEL SAMPLING

Nine provinces were selected on the basis of having previously been featured in the program

The proportion of interviews conducted was determined using the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) method



Methodology and Sampling Plan (3)

DISTRICT LEVEL SAMPLING

- Two distinct samples were drawn
- Same questions (the 'survey instrument') were used in both cases

Sample One

- Three districts were selected randomly from each of the nine Provinces

Sample Two

- The districts in each province were selected from (a) provincial centre, (b) adjacent (to the provincial centre), and (c) remote (from the provincial centre)



Key Findings

- The third most-watched program in Afghanistan
 - 37% to 46% of the Afghan population watches the show - equivalent of between 10.8 and 13.4 million people
- 60% of those who have seen the program watch it every week
- Afghans associate the program with nation-building and as an opportunity to learn about the country
- Main themes identified: advances in road infrastructure, better schooling and female empowerment in recent years



Key Findings (2)

- The results confounded the conventional wisdom in Afghanistan about the reach of television within the country
 - No significant differences were noticed in viewership among people across different income groups because of prevalence of communal TVs
- Viewers want the program to continue and be extended to one hour
- Nearly half of the survey respondents believed that USAID funded the program. This did not bother them
- Individuals with access to TV tended to be more supportive of the US than those without access



Insights: Public Diplomacy Efforts

- A reality-style television show can be an effective way to reach a large portion of a country's population, especially in the developing world
- In the developing world, TV is an "emerging technology"; the trend is that more and more people are watching (45% in 1995; 60% in 2005)
- From a public diplomacy viewpoint, such sponsorship has a high cost-benefit ratio, but a number of risks must be managed



Insights: Public Diplomacy Efforts (2)

- A reality TV show (with a local face) focused on highlighting local progress and culture can build a credible (counter-) narrative
- Relatively inexpensive to produce a high quality program that attracts big audiences
- Observations applicable for many developing countries; we believe this experience is replicable
- Local ownership is crucial
- Currently in its second season of broadcasting, the show has benefited from the suggestions that came out of this study